

Connecticut General Assembly
Testimony of Sal Luciano, Executive Director Council 4 AFSCME
Before the Labor and Public Employees Committee

Good afternoon Chairman Prague, Chairman Zalaski and members of the Labor and Public Employees Committee, my name is Sal Luciano. I am Executive Director of Council 4 AFSCME, a union that represents over 35,000 workers in Connecticut. Thank you for giving me this opportunity to address the committee.

We urge you to reject Senate Bill ⁹⁹⁰95, An act exempting municipalities from the prevailing wage requirement, and we strongly oppose any legislation to reduce the rate by changing survey methods or any other means. Prevailing wage statutes, such as this one, and the Federal Davis-Bacon Act serve to protect the quality of construction by effectively insuring that highly qualified construction workers perform the work. This is accomplished by establishing the usual or prevailing wage for particular trades. A common misconception is that the rates required under these statutes are union rates. That is simply untrue. The rates are based on rates determined by surveying all wage rates, not just unionized employers, by labor market throughout the state.

Proponents of legislation to limit or eliminate prevailing wage laws claim that the laws drive up the cost of construction, but there is absolutely no credible evidence that this is true. In fact the opposite is true. Construction projects built under prevailing wages tend to be completed sooner for one simple reason: the tradespersons are highly trained and competent, thus reducing costly and time consuming errors that result from using untrained or inexperienced workers.

Labor Commissioner Glen Marshall comes from the trades. He knows first hand what goes on. He was talking from experience when he told at CT Mirror reporter recently said that unscrupulous contractors hurt us all when they employ workers and pay under-the-table wages. He said, "They not only cheat the workers, they cheat the whole system."

An OLR Research report published this past October found that contrary to claims by the proponents of this bill, the Connecticut rates are modest when compared to its neighboring states, "The prevailing rates in Connecticut are typically in the lower half among the areas surveyed. . . the [Connecticut] prevailing wage . . . averages roughly \$16 less than [the same trade] in Westchester County. Connecticut is America's wealthiest state. I'd call that a bargain.

Please don't fix what's not broken.

Thank you.